

PRETEST COUNSELING CONVERSATION GUIDE FOR HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS

FOR PREGNANT WOMEN WITH SYMPTOMS OF ZIKA



This guide describes recommendations for conducting pretesting counseling for symptomatic pregnant women with possible recent exposure (they or their sex partner live in or recently traveled to [an area with risk of Zika](#)). Symptoms of Zika include red eyes, fever, joint pain, and rash. CDC recommends testing for pregnant women with symptoms of Zika. This material includes sample scripts to guide discussions with your patients about the complexity of Zika testing and the testing process with patients. Because a lot of content is outlined for discussion, make additional information available to support messaging and ensure that patients understand what they are being told.

Pregnant women coming in for Zika testing may feel worried or anxious. Support them by providing them with clear and easy-to-understand information and expressing empathy by acknowledging their concerns and feelings during pretesting counseling.

Recommendation

Sample Script

Provide the patient with information on why you will be testing them for Zika and a brief overview of what to expect

Use one of the two following sentences to begin the discussion:

1. You may be at risk for having Zika since you or your sex partner recently traveled to (*replace “recently traveled to” with “live in” as appropriate*) an area with risk of Zika within the past 12 weeks and you have had (*replace ‘have had’ with “during your pregnancy you previously had” as appropriate*) symptoms of Zika.
OR/AND
2. You may be at risk of having Zika because you recently had sex without a condom with a person who traveled to (*replace “traveled to” with “lives in” as appropriate*) an area with risk of Zika within the past 12 weeks and you have had (*replace ‘have had’ with “during your pregnancy you previously developed” as appropriate*) symptoms of Zika.

Since you may have been exposed to Zika and are experiencing symptoms (*replace “are experiencing” with “during your pregnancy you previously experienced” as appropriate*), I think it is best to move forward with testing you for Zika. Before we begin, I would like to tell you what to expect throughout this process.

Patients should be informed that a combination of Zika tests will be required before a final result is determined

You will need a combination of tests to determine whether or not you have Zika. Finding out if you have Zika can require up to three different kinds of tests because the result of one test may require more testing to find out if you recently had a Zika infection. The tests we use to detect Zika can detect other similar viruses often found in the same areas with risk of Zika. Sometimes even after several tests, we may not know which type of virus you were infected with. Each test result is important, because it may help me decide how best to care for you during pregnancy.

I want to be sure we take all of the necessary steps to make sure your results are accurate. Each test can take different amounts of time to receive results, which I know can be frustrating. As your healthcare provider I am here to answer any questions you may have.

- Reassure the patient that this method of testing is normal
- Consider providing the fact sheet [What You Should Know About Zika Virus Testing for Pregnant Women with Symptoms of Zika](#).

Let the patient know that you will be ordering two tests; one to look for Zika RNA and one to look for Zika antibodies. Define these terms as they may be unfamiliar

I am going to start the testing process by ordering two tests:

- The first test looks for genetic material of Zika virus, known as RNA. RNA can be found in blood and urine.
- The second test looks for Zika antibodies, which are proteins that your body makes to fight off a Zika infection.

Zika test results can be difficult to interpret. If you’ve had exposure to Zika virus or another similar virus before this pregnancy, it’s possible that you’ve been infected before, and this could affect today’s test results.

Recommendation

Sample Script

Patients should be informed that it can be challenging to understand test results and that previous exposure to Zika could affect their test results

Scientists have learned that Zika antibodies can stay in your blood for several months after infection. Antibodies show evidence that your body fought off a recent Zika infection. It is possible that you may have already developed antibodies against Zika virus if you've lived in or frequently traveled to an area with risk of Zika before becoming pregnant. Because of this, it is possible that your Zika antibody test results may not tell me if you were infected in the past or if you were infected more recently during your current pregnancy. This means if you test positive, we may not know if you are currently infected or not.

Ask the patient if she has any questions before you move forward with providing information on the testing process.

Inform the patient of what the possible results of the Zika RNA and antibody tests may be

- If your Zika RNA test comes back with a positive result, regardless of your test result for Zika antibodies, it most likely means that you have recently been infected with Zika.
- If your Zika RNA test comes back negative and your antibody test is positive, we will need to do one more round of testing to figure out whether or not you actually have or recently had Zika. A positive antibody test may mean that you had Zika but the virus is no longer in your body or it could mean that you had an infection with another similar virus.
- If your Zika RNA test and your antibody test are both negative, it means there is no evidence that you have Zika or another similar virus and I will continue evaluating you to find out what may be causing your symptoms.

Ask the patient if they have any questions before you move forward with providing information on step two of testing.

If the patient requires further testing after the Zika RNA and Zika antibody test, inform the patient and provide them with information on what to possibly expect next.

If you test negative for Zika RNA and your antibody test is positive, I will need to order a third test to confirm whether the antibodies are for Zika or a similar virus. This test takes the longest to receive results because I have to send the results to a specialized lab and then work with the state or local health department to interpret the results.

Ask the patient if they have any questions on what to expect during each step of the testing process.

Inform patients of each what each test result could mean for their pregnancy.

Now we'll go over what each test result could mean for your pregnancy.

If Zika test results are positive

If you test positive for Zika, I will need to watch your pregnancy more closely. I may do more ultrasounds or other tests to check for your fetus's growth and development.

If Zika test results are not clearly positive or negative

Sometimes test results will not come back as a clear negative or positive. If this happens, I'd rather be more cautious and still do more ultrasounds and other tests to closely monitor your pregnancy.

If Zika test results are negative.

If your test results are negative, I will do an ultrasound to check the growth and development of your fetus and check for any signs of Zika virus infection. If I see any signs of Zika during the ultrasound, then I may order additional tests. If there are no signs of Zika, we will continue with routine prenatal care.